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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Interbureau Committee on Post-War Programs
Washington 25, D. C.

October 6,1944

FACT SHEET

Recommendations On Post-War Use of Nitrogen Plants

In the United States there are 9 publicly owned synthetic ammonia plants built by the Federal Government to produce nitrogen for use in explosives. The question arises: "What should be done with these plants when the war is over?"

The Department of Agriculture's Interbureau Committee on Post-War Programs has made a study of this problem and recommends that some of these synthetic ammonia plants be used for the production of solid nitrogen fertilizer. The adoption of these recommendations, the Committee believes, would help to assure farmers enough nitrogen fertilizer to meet their demands for reasonable prices after the war, enable the people of this country generally to realize beneficial peace-time results from the public money invested in chemical war plants, and in case of emergency to provide nitrogen for explosives without jeopardizing the Nation's food supply.

No recommendation is made as to whether the Government or private industry should operate these plants after the war, but the Committee's report on the subject favors the ultimate conversion of nearly 40% of the total rated nitrogen-producing capacity of existing Government plants for the production of granular nitrogen fertilizer, ammonia, and ammonia derivitives to meet post-war requirements of agriculture and industry. It is also recommended that all other Government nitrogen-producing plants should be maintained in a stand-by condition as part of the military establishment in order that they will be available to meet unanticipated demands for fixed nitrogen, should they arise.

Estimates of nitrogen consumption in this country are based on national and farm income, nitrogen fertilizer prices, and soil and crop needs. Under relatively unfavorable conditions fertilizer nitrogen consumption is estimated at 500,000 tons (in terms of nitrogen); under favorable conditions, 750,000 tons; and under most favorable conditions, 900,000 tons.

Industrial consumption is expected to range between 175,000 and 300,000 tons of nitrogen. In addition to certain synthetic products, substantial importation of natural Chilean nitrate of soda and other nitrogenous fertilizer will be necessary. The United States is one of the few industrial countries which did not produce as much nitrogen as it required before the war.

Use of some of the plants for producing fertilizer would continue a practice that has developed during the war, under which surplus War Department ammonia has been diverted to the production of fertilizer, substantially increasing the supply of nitrogen fertilizer for use on 1944 crops.

The Committee, after pointing out an immediate demand for more granular nitrogen fertilizer, recommends that some of the Government ammonia plants be equipped to produce such fertilizers by modern methods. This would require substantial capital

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investment but would permit the production of improved granular fertilizer at costs lower than those now incurred in making granular nitrogen from surplus ammonia. The installation of this necessary equipment now would not interfere with military use of the plants and on the other hand would permit the best use of surplus ammoni at the present time. It would also be the first step in converting the plants to meet anticipated post-war demands.

The proposed conversion of about 40% of the Government plants' capacity for production of civilian requirements would give the country a fixed nitrogen capacity of about a million tons, plus a substantial reserve capacity to meet unanticipated needs, either military or civilian.

Scientists have found that nitrogen is so necessary to the growth and reproduction of both plants and animals that without it, all life would cease to exist. It is easily lost from the soil, and in large areas of the United States, the soils will not produce economically unless farmers add nitrogen regularly by applying fertilizer or growing legumes.

Copies of the Interbureau Committee's 15-page report are available upon request to the Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D. C.

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